

**Remarks Commemorating the 25th Anniversary of the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement at Ulster University in Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom**  
*April 12, 2023*

Well, good afternoon, everyone. What a great—please have a seat. It's a great honor to be here.

I just told Gabrielle that when she's the leading public figure in this country and I show up, to promise you won't say, "Joe who is outside?" [*Laughter*] You'll say, "Joe Biden." Remember—just remember me, okay? You promise? All right.

Chancellor Davidson, Vice-Chancellor Bartholomew, thank you for hosting us today on this beautiful campus of Ulster University. I came here in '91, in this neighborhood, and you couldn't have a glass building like this here in this neighborhood, I don't think. I don't think it would have stood up very well. But things are changing.

Lord Mayor Black and Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Heaton-Harris, thank you for the welcome to Belfast.

And, Mr. Speaker and leaders of Northern Ireland's leading five political parties, I was honored to welcome you to the White House a few weeks ago, and it's wonderful to see all of you again today.

And, Ambassador Hartley, thank you for your outstanding work leading our Mission to the U.K. Ambassador Hartley is an old friend.

And the former Ambassador from Great Britain to the United States—the home of that Ambassador and the Embassy is along the fence line of the Vice President's Residence, which I lived in for 8 years. And the Vice President and I became—I became friends with the Ambassador. And his last trip back home, before he came back to Washington to serve out the final few months of his term, he told me he was going to bring something back for me.

And so I didn't know what he had in mind, but when he came back, we had him over to the house. We spent some time together, he and his wife and I and my wife. And he brought back a book with a photograph on the front of the book. A—it had been just reprinted, the book—of a somewhat stout British captain in his quarters with a big bulldog sitting next to him. And his name was Captain George Biden. Because he used to always kid me and say: "You know, Biden's English. You talk about the Irish. Biden's English." [*Laughter*]

And he told me that he went back, and he had the Lord Admiralty—this is the God's truth story—check. And my great-great—1840s—I think it was 1842, could have been 1828; I can't remember—it's one of those two dates—had written the rules of mutiny for the British Navy. [*Laughter*] And I said, "Well, at least that part is consistent, Reverend." [*Laughter*] The mutiny.

But anyway, he used to always kid me when I'd say—you know, I'd talk about—he'd say, "Yeah, you talk about the Irish." He said: "You're English. Just remember that."

Then I found out—my sister and I found out the name Robinette—Robinette, my middle name is Robinette. I thought that, all of those years, it was French. It must have been Huguenots because they came to Great Britain in the 1700s somewhere along the way, and they're all from Nottingham. So I don't know what the hell is going on here. [*Laughter*] You come back, it's confusing.

And anyway—Consul General Naran—Narain and Envoy—Special Envoy Joe Kennedy, thank you for your efforts to continue deepening and strengthening the ties between Northern Ireland and the United States.

It's good to see Belfast, a city that's alive with commerce, art, and, I would argue, inspiration. The dividends of peace are all around us.

And this very campus is situated in an intersection where conflict and bloodshed once held terrible sway. The idea, as I said, to have a glass building here when I was here in '91 was highly unlikely.

Where barbed wire once sliced up the city, today we find cathedral—a cathedral of learning built of glass and let the shine—light out—in and out. It just has a profound impact for someone who has come back to see it. You know, it's an incredible testament to the power and the possibilities of peace.

Twenty-five years ago this week, the landmark Belfast/Good Friday Agreement was signed. And it wasn't easy. I was a United States Senator at the time. And I worked very closely with my good friend George Mitchell, who will be here, I believe, within a couple days. And there were no guarantees that the deal on paper would hold, no guarantees that it would be able to deliver the progress we celebrate today.

And it took long, hard years of work to get to this place. It took a people willing to come together in good faith and to risk boldly for the future. Leaders and—for peace like John Hume and David Trimble and David Ervine and Monica McWilliams and Mary Robinson, et cetera. They were all people that I got to meet back then.

And it took people across—all across Northern Ireland who made the choice to work for a brighter and a shared future. At the time, it seemed so distant, some of it. It seemed so distant.

First at the ballot box and every day since, the acts of seeing each other through the lens of a common humanity, which, again, when I first came here as a young Senator, didn't seem like it was realistic.

It took pioneering women across all communities and parties that said "enough"—"enough"—and demanded change as well as a seat at the negotiating table, including through the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition.

And it took a determined effort of my good friend who—someone who embodies the country's commitment to all the people—all the people—in this region, Senator George Mitchell. And you know, his time serving as Special Envoy for Northern Ireland is one of the great examples in history of the right person for the right job at the right time, in my view.

I think sometimes, especially when the distance of history, we forget how hard-earned, how astounding that peace was at the moment. It shifted the political gravity in our world. It literally—it shifted the political gravity.

In 1998, it was the longest running conflict in Europe since the end of World War II. Thousands of families had been affected by the Troubles. The losses were real. The pain was personal. I need not tell many people in this audience. Every person killed in the Troubles left an empty chair at that dining room table and a hole in the heart that was never filled for the ones they lost.

Peace was not inevitable. We can't ever forget that. There was nothing inevitable about it.

As George Mitchell often said, the negotiations had, quote, "Seven hundred days of failure and one day of success." Seven hundred days of failure and one day of success. But they kept going because George and all the many others never stopped believing that success was possible.

And I want all of you to know, especially the young people in the audience today——

*[At this point, the President briefly addressed students seated in the balcony behind him as follows.]*

And don't jump, okay? *[Laughter]* Oh, I didn't see you all the way up there. *[Laughter]* As my father would say: "Please, excuse my back. I apologize." *[Laughter]*

But all kidding aside, the American people were with you—are with you—every step of the way. It's real. Those of you who've been to America know that there is a large population that is invested in what happens here, that cares a great deal about what happens here.

Supporting the people of Northern Ireland, protecting the peace, preserving the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement is a priority for Democrats and Republicans alike in the United States, and that is unusual today because we've been very divided in our parties. This is something that brings Washington together. It brings America together.

I spoke about this with Northern Ireland's political leaders, as well as the Taoiseach, at our St. Patrick's Day celebration at the White House. This has been a key focus for me throughout my career.

I remember working as a Senator to see how the United States could support and encourage bit by bit any moves toward peace. I got elected in 1972 as a 29-year-old kid to the United States Senate, and it was just the start of it. I mean, it seemed like it was a goal that was so far away.

I remember coming here, as I said, in '91, seeing this city divided and barricaded. Then, in '94, when the cease-fire was declared, it was like a sea change. The tide of violence began to recede. Hope rolling in. In 1998, overwhelming joy.

It's hard to communicate just how deeply invested your success—in your success the people across the United States are. And those of you who've been there know it. You know it. I'm not making this up. This is real. This is—it's almost—people can taste it.

The family ties and the pride in those Ulster Scots immigrants—those—those Ulster Scots immigrants who helped found and build my country, they run very deep—very deep.

Men born in Ulster were among those who signed the Declaration of Independence in the United States, pledging their lives, their fortunes, and their sacred honor for freedom's cause. The man who printed the revolutionary document was John Dunlap. He hailed from County Tyrone. And countless, countless others established new lives of opportunity across the Atlantic—planting farms, founding communities, starting businesses—never forgetting their connection to this island.

As a matter of fact, as you walk into my office in the—in the Oval Office in the United States Capital—guess what? You know who founded and designed and built the White House? An Irishman. An Irish—*[laughter]*—no, not a joke. Not a joke.

Passing it down, generation after generation. Your history is our history. But even more important, your future is America's future.

Today's Belfast is the beating heart of Northern Ireland, and it's poised to drive unprecedented economic opportunity and investment from communities across the U.K., across Ireland, and across the United States.

The simple truth is that peace and economic opportunity go together. Peace and economic opportunity go together.

In the 25 years since the Good Friday Agreement, Northern Ireland's gross domestic product has literally doubled. Doubled. And I predict to you, if things continue to move in the right direction, it will more than triple.

There are scores of major American corporations wanting to come here, wanting to invest. Many have already made homes in Northern Ireland, employing over 30,000 people. And in just the past decade, American business has generated almost \$2 billion in investment in the region. Two billion dollars.

Today, Northern Ireland is a churn of creativity, art, poetry, theater. Some of our favorite television shows and movies are filmed here—[laughter]—as you know.

And I understand the star of the recent Oscar-winning film and someone—a Belfast barista, James Martin, is here today. James, where are you? I got to meet James, and I got my picture taken. I'm going to go home and brag to my daughter. [Laughter]

Cruise ships packed with tourists fill Belfast Port. And young people, instead of fleeing for opportunities elsewhere, can see their futures and careers for themselves that speak to unlimited possibilities here.

How many of you have heard over the years, those of you old—closer to my age: "Mom, Dad, there's nothing here for me. I'm going to move. I'm going to leave. I got to go." Well, it's not happening now.

So it's up to us to keep this going—to keep building on the work that has been done every day for the last 25 years; to sustain the peace, unleash this incredible economic opportunity, which is just beginning. I promise you. You think I'm joking. It's just beginning. We get this—keep it going.

We all know there is more we can do together.

You know, there is so much energy and dynamism, especially among young people, who are starting their own businesses, blazing their own trails, connecting to the global community of entrepreneurs. And young people in Northern Ireland are on the cutting edge of sectors that are going to define so much of the future: cyber, technology, clean energy, life sciences.

Here in Northern Ireland, programs like Young Entrepreneur—Young Enterprise Northern Ireland, helping thousands of young people each year gain skills and pursue the goals—their goals as entrepreneurs.

That's why I asked Joe Kennedy, my new Special Envoy in Northern Ireland of Economic Affairs, to help supercharge that work to bring more businesses, more investment, more opportunity here to Northern Ireland and help realize the enormous economic potential of this region.

Because I'd note parenthetically: When that happens here, it gives faith to people around the world. If it can be done here, it can be done in my community. Not a joke.

The world is changing. It's changing drastically, and it presents enormous opportunity, but also significant dangers. To that end, later this year, Joe is going to be leading a trade delegation of American companies to Northern Ireland.

Now, I know the U.K.'s departure from the European Union created complex challenges here in Northern Ireland. And I encouraged the leaders of the U.K. and EU to address the issues in a way that served Northern Ireland's best interests. I deeply appreciate the personal leadership of Prime Minister Sunak and European Commissioner von der Leyen to reach an agreement.

The "Windsor Framework" addresses the practical realities of Brexit and the essential—and it's an essential step to ensuring hard-earned peace and progress of the Good Friday Agreement is—that they're preserved and strengthened. You know, the negotiators listened to business leaders across the U.K. and Ireland who shared what they needed to succeed. And I believe the stability and predictability offered by this framework will encourage greater investment in Northern Ireland, significant investment in Northern Ireland.

I come from a little State where—the State of Delaware, back home, that has more corporations that are registered in that State than every other State in the Union combined. So I know a little bit about corporate attitudes.

All the immense progress we see around us was built through conversation and compromise, discussion and debate, voting and inclusion. It's an incredible attestation to the power of democracy to deliver the needs for all the people.

And now I know better than most how hard democracy can be at times. We in the United States have firsthand experience how fragile even longstanding democratic institutions can be. You saw what happened on January the 6th in my country.

We learn anew with every generation that democracy needs champions. When I went to college, I was a political science major and history major. We were taught every generation has to fight to preserve democracies. I didn't believe it at the time. I just thought it was automatic. We had this great democracy. What would we need to do?

As a friend, I hope it's not too presumptuous for me to say that I believe democratic institutions established through the Good Friday Agreement remain critical for the future of Northern Ireland. It's a decision for you to make, not for me to make. But it seems to me they're related.

An effective, devolved government that reflects the people of Northern Ireland and is accountable to them. A government that works to find ways through hard problems together is going to draw even greater opportunity in this region.

So I hope the Assembly and the Executive will soon be restored—that's a judgment for you to make, not me, but I hope it happens—along with the institutions that facilitate North-South and East-West relations, all of which are vital pieces of the Good Friday Agreement.

For in politics, no matter what divides us, if we look hard enough, there are always areas that are going to bring us together if we look hard enough. Standing for peace, rejecting political violence must be one of those things.

So I want to once more recognize the way the leaders of Northern Ireland's major political parties come together in the wake of the attempted murder of Detective Chief Inspector Caldwell to show that the enemies of peace will not prevail. Northern Ireland will not go back, pray to God.

The attack was a hard reminder that there will always be those who seek to destroy rather than rebuild. But the lesson of the Good Friday Agreement is this: In times when things seem fragile or easily broken, that is when hope and hard work are needed the most. That's when we must make our theme "repair." Repair.

And in the holy Easter season—this season—when all Christians celebrate renewal and life, the Good Friday Agreement showed us that there is hope for repair even in the most awful breakages. You know, it helped people all around the world to hope for renewal and progress in their own lives. And most of all, it allowed an entire generation of young people in Northern Ireland and across the U.K. and in the Republic of Ireland to grow up in a society mended by connection, made stronger by independence—interdependence and respect.

Young people like Gabrielle, who we just heard from earlier. Her success and her opportunities have been underwritten by the Good Friday Agreement. Young people like Jordan Graham, born less than 3 weeks after the agreement was signed in 1998. His whole life—his whole life has unfolded under the wing of peace, which means, not quite 25 years of age, he's been able to build an expertise in branding and marketing that he's used to help grow local businesses, support startups, and consult for charities.

Young people like Aimée Clint, born in 2000, whose parents like to tell the story about how she came home from her first day of secondary school and asked, "What's the difference between a Protestant and a Catholic?" What's the difference between a Protestant and a Catholic? She didn't grow up thinking in sectarian divides. She grew up thinking about how she should support her beloved brother and other children with autism.

Today, Aimee's social enterprise has donated more than 5,000 copies of her book to schools across Northern Ireland to help children better understand autism and to learn to treat others with kindness and respect.

That's the real power of the Good Friday Agreement: compassion. Compassion. It changed how this entire region sees itself.

In the words of Morrissey, Belfast's first poet laureate: "What's left is dark and quiet . . . but book-ended by light, as when Dorothy opens the dull cabin door and"—happens out—"what happens outside is technicolor." What happens outside is technicolor.

This is place is transformed by peace, made technicolor by peace, made whole by peace.

So today I come to Belfast to pledge to all the people of Northern Ireland: The United States of America will continue to be your partner in building the future the young people of our world deserve. It matters to us, to Americans, and to me personally. It genuinely matters if you travel in my country.

So let's celebrate 25 extraordinary years by recommitting to renewal, repair; by making this exceptional peace the birthright of every child in Northern Ireland for all the days to come. That's what we should be doing. God willing, you'll be able to do it.

Thank you all for listening, and may God bring you the peace we need. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:54 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to entrepreneur and Ulster University graduate Gabrielle Feenan, who introduced the President; Colin Davidson, chancellor, and Paul Bartholomew, vice-chancellor, Ulster University; Lord Mayor and Councillor Christina Black of Belfast, Northern Ireland; Secretary of State for Northern Ireland Chris Heaton-Harris of the United Kingdom; Speaker Alex Maskey of the Northern Ireland Assembly; Michelle O'Neill, vice president, Sinn Féin opposition party in Ireland and Northern Ireland; Naomi Long and Doug Beattie, members, Northern Ireland Assembly, in their respective capacities as leaders of the Alliance Party and Ulster Unionist Party; Members of Parliament Jeffrey M. Donaldson and Colum Eastwood of the United Kingdom, in their respective capacities as leaders of the Democratic Unionist Party and Social Democratic and Labour Party; U.S. Ambassador to the United Kingdom Jane D. Hartley; United Kingdom's former Ambassador to the U.S. Peter Westmacott and his wife Susie Nemazee; U.S. Consul General Belfast Paul Narain; Monica McWilliams, founder of the Northern Ireland Women's Coalition and delegate to the multiparty negotiations leading to the Belfast/Good Friday Agreement; former President Mary Robinson of Ireland; Prime Minister Leo Varadkar of Ireland; President Ursula von der Leyen of the European Commission; Detective Chief Inspector John Caldwell of the Police Service of Northern Ireland, who was shot several times by suspected New Irish Republican Army gunmen in Omagh, Northern Ireland, on February 22; Jordan Graham, member of the board of directors of Young

Enterprise Northern Ireland; Aimée Clint, founder, Books by Stellas, her parents David and Vicki, and her brother Callum; and Sinéad Morrissey, poet laureate of Belfast, Northern Ireland. He also referred to his sister Valerie Biden Owens.

*Categories:* Addresses and Remarks : Belfast/Good Friday Agreement at Ulster University in Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom, 25th anniversary commemoration.

*Locations:* Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom.

*Names:* Bartholomew, Paul; Beattie, Doug; Biden, Ashley; Biden, Jill T.; Black, Christina; Caldwell, John; Clint, Aimée; Clint, Callum; Clint, David; Clint, Vicki; Davidson, Colin; Donaldson, Jeffrey M.; Eastwood, Colum; Feenan, Gabrielle; Graham, Jordan; Hartley, Jane D.; Heaton-Harris, Chris; Kennedy, Joseph P., III; Long, Naomi; Martin, James; Maskey, Alex; McWilliams, Monica; Mitchell, George J.; Morrissey, Sinéad; Narain, Paul; Nemazee, Susie; O'Neill, Michelle; Owens, Valerie Biden; Robinson, Mary; Sunak, Rishi; Varadkar, Leo; von der Leyen, Ursula; Westmacott, Peter.

*Subjects:* 2021 civil unrest and violence at U.S. Capitol; European Commission President; Ireland, Belfast/Good Friday Agreement; Ireland, Prime Minister; Northern Ireland, United Kingdom-European Union "Windsor Framework" agreement; U.S. Special Envoy to Northern Ireland for Economic Affairs; United Kingdom, Belfast/Good Friday Agreement; United Kingdom, President Biden's visit; United Kingdom, Prime Minister; United Kingdom, relations with U.S.; United Kingdom, Secretary of State for Northern Ireland; United Kingdom, trade with U.S.; United Kingdom, U.S. Ambassador; United Kingdom, Ulster University in Belfast, Northern Ireland; United Kingdom, withdrawal from European Union.

*DCPD Number:* DCPD202300291.